RUPEE SERIES

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

# ASPECTS OF OUR RELIGION

Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati

GENERAL EDITORS

K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN, BOMBAY

# What Bharatiya Vidya Stands for

Bharatiya Shiksha must ensure that no promising young Indian of character having faith in Bharat and her culture Bharatiya Vidya should be left without modern educational equipment by reason merely of want of funds.

2. Bharatiya Shiksha must be formative more than informative, and cannot have for its end mere acquisition of knowledge. Its legitimate sphere is not only to develop natural talents but so to shape them as to enable them to absorb and express the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya.

3. Bharatiya Shiksha must take into account not only the full growth of a student's personality but the totality of his relations and lead him to the highest self-fulfilment of which he is capable.

4. Bharatiya Shiksha must involve at some stage or other an intensive study of Sanskrit or Sanskritic languages and their literature, without excluding, if so desired, the study of other languages and literature, ancient and modern.

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, iddas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power of expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

*Let noble thoughts come to us from every side*

—Rigveda, I.89.i

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By

SRI CHANDRASEKHARENDRA SARASWATI

(Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetham)

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1966

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bhavan's Book University volumes had rare success. About a million and a quarter volumes have been sold in about eleven years. However, there is an insistent demand for the stray volumes which the Bhavan has issued from time to time at a lower price. In order to meet this demand, it has been decided to issue the new One-Rupee Book University Series side by side with the Book University Series.

I hope this new One-Rupee Series will have the same good fortune which the other Series had, of being useful to those who are interested in the fundamental values of Indian Culture, and of reaching out to a wider audience.

Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
Chowpatty Road, Bombay-7.
*Vijaya Dashami*
September 28, 1963

K. M. MUNSHI

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book has been compiled out of the published English translations of the discourses delivered in Tamil by His Holiness the Sankaracharya, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetha in Madras during His Holiness's visits to that city in 1932 and in 1957 to 1959, and from material gathered during privileged interviews with His Holiness.

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# I. OUR RELIGION

There are many religions in the world today. Each has a name of its own. These names are personal and indicate the founders of the respective faiths. Buddhism, Jainism, Mahomedanism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism are examples. They are all founded religions. They were founded each at a certain time in the history of the world. The founders of these religions were personages of great holiness. They had the power to attract many men to their way of thinking. They acquired a large following.

If an English-educated youth belonging to our religion is asked what his religion is, he would reply that he professes the 'Hindu' religion. Go to a village and ask a peasant what his religion is. He will not be able to give a name to his religion. The name 'Hinduism' which is used now to denote our religion was unknown to our ancestors and is also unknown to the common man among us.

What then is the name that is given to our religion? The fact is that our religion has no name. This may appear to be strange. But there is nothing strange about it. Just consider. When and why is a name given to a thing? We give a name to a thing when there are more than one of the same kind and to distinguish one from the other or others. If there is one only of a thing, there is no need to give it a name.

The same is the case with our religion. Other religions did not exist before the time of their founders. Ours is a religion which existed long before the founded religions. Obviously, it

was the only religion in the world ministering to the spiritual needs of mankind as a whole. There was no second religion from which it was required to be distinguished. Hence, there was no need for a name for it. It was, and even now continues to be nameless.

We have no evidence as to when our religion 'began'. Obviously, it did not 'begin' at a particular time. It must be said to be beginningless. It has been existing always. It is *sanaatana.* The nearest Sanskrit word for religion is *dharma,* though *dharma* signifies much more than religion. Our religion, cannot be named after a founder; for there was no founder for it. So, if at all it is necessary to give a name to our religion, it can only be called *sanaatana dharma* or the eternal religion.

The founded religions derive their authority from the words of their founders. These words are collected together as a sacred or Holy Book which is the Scripture or the Testament of the respective religions. The Holy Koran, the Holy Bible, the Tripitaka are examples. Each of these holy books is the source book of a particular religion. What is the source-book or scripture of our religion? The Vedas are the scripture of our religion. They express eternal Truths which govern the universe and the conduct of men. They are absolutely authoritative. Frequently, when challenging the statement of a person, it is asked in Tamil 'What? Is his statement a *Veda-vaak?*' signifying that *Veda-vaak,* a Vedic statement is inherently true.

There are two main sects among the Christians, the Catholics and the Protestants. But, the name

of God is the same to both of them. The Catholics do not refer to God by one name and the Protestants by another. Both have a common Holy Book, namely the *Bible*. The same is true with Muslims who also have two main divisions among them. But both of them call their God *Allah* and the *Koran* is their Holy Book. Among Hindus too, there are two main divisions, Saivites and Vaishnavites. But they do not refer to God by the same name. The Saivites call Him Siva and the Vaishnavites call Him Vishnu. In the Tamil Nad each goes by a separate Holy Book, *Tevaaram* for the former, and *Divya Prabandham* for the latter. But the basis for these two scriptures is the Vedas. *Divya Prabandham* is called Tamil-Vedam. The Saivites too acknowledge allegiance to the Vedas. So, the Vedas are the taproot of all sects of our religion. Whatever denomination we may belong to, our common allegiance is to the Vedas.

The Vedas are the source of our religion. They are spoken of as the breath of God. In the Vedas, there is an identity of sound and sense, of the word and its meaning. The meaning resides in the sound. The fullness and the correctness of the meaning depend on the fullness and correctness of the utterance of the sound. The Vedic sentences are called *mantras* which embody sound and meaning in one. Any fault or deviation in their utterance will detract from the meaning or distort it.

This accounts for the fact that in our tradition, the Vedas were not put to writing. They were received through the ear and transmitted by the mouth to another through his ear. The Vedas are

called Sruti, what is *heard*. They were handed by word of mouth from generation to generation by a competent teacher to a qualified pupil. In fact, it was never intended that the Vedas should be written. In Tamil, the Vedas are spoken of as 'hidden' (*marai*) and as an 'unwritten book' (*ezhudaakkilavi*). Anything written is liable to the faults of omission, commission, alteration and interpolation consciously or unconsciously. Such faults are likely to be augmented when copies are made from an original by hand, and copies of copies are continuously being made over the years.

There are devices relating to learning of the Vedas through hearing which help to preserve them in their original form in the process of oral transmission through centuries. These relate to the number and the order of words in every Vedamantra, the time interval between the sounds, the pitch of voice for each sound and the part of the body from which it should come. All this cannot be learnt from writing, but must be learnt by imitating the manner in which the teacher utters the mantra. Learning in this manner, imitating the teacher, is called *Veda-adhyayana.* If the Vedas are written, or if they are printed as now, one may know the words and their meanings; but such knowledge will not help the proper utterance of the mantras. When not properly uttered, they will not be efficacious, and what is worse, they may even be harmful, producing a meaning and an effect contrary to what is intended on account of wrong intonation, accent and emphasis.

Therefore, in the Hindu tradition, a person who learns the Vedas reading from a book or

manuscript is included among the inferior class of learners and he is also considered to be blameworthy. Giving a list of such offenders, a sloka says :

*geeti seeghri sirahkampee tathaa likhitapaatakah*
*anarthajnah alpakantascha shaidaite paatakaadhamaah.*

The meaning of this is : 'He who sings the Vedas, he who chants them very fast, he who shakes his head while chanting, *he who reads from writing,* he who does not know the meaning and he whose voice is low—these are very inferior learners of the Vedas.'

Thus, the Vedas have been preserved not by being written, but by the process of oral learning or *adhyayana.* It is the duty of the Braahmanas to engage themselves in this task. It is a whole-time job, in fact a function extending all through life. Pursuit of other avocations of life will interfere with it. That is why Braahmanas are forbidden from engaging in other pursuits. That is also the reason why other persons to whom other avocations in life appropriately belong are not entrusted with this task of thus preserving the Vedas. They have been prohibited from learning the Vedas. This is not to be understood as discriminating against them. This has been ordained only to ensure that they discharge their own functions in society undistracted by other pursuits.

As the Braahmana is not to engage in any other worldly profession, he could not earn his livelihood as others do. So, it became the duty of society to maintain him in reasonable comfort to help him to discharge his duty of *Vedaadhya-*

*yana,* learning the Vedas and *Veda rakshana,* preserving them. This is not to be understood as giving the Braahmana a privileged position in society, nor is he to be considered as a parasite on society. As the other members of the society function to promote the secular welfare of themselves and their fellowmen, the Braahmanas are charged with the duty of doing whatever is necessary to promote their spiritual welfare. Providing for their livelihood was accepted as an obligation and in ancient times it was discharged with joyous willingness.

On their part, it is the duty of the Braahmanas to engage themselves in *Vedaadhyayana,* because that is their function in society. Unfortunately, in modern times, most Braahmanas have neglected this duty and are pursuing professions proper to others in the society. Or, the duty has been relegated to a very small minority among themselves who are classed as *Vaidikas.* We forget that all Braahmanas are *Vaidikas,* that is those who must perform *Vedaadhyayana.*

## II. OURS—A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

We said that the Vedic religion was the earliest religion of mankind. All other religions arose only after it. There are evidences to conclude that it was prevalent all over the globe. We shall mention a few of them.

An inscription unearthed in Egypt and dated 1280 B.C., contains the terms of a treaty between Rameses II and the Hittites. In this treaty, *Maitravaruna,* a Vedic dual deity has been cited as a witness. (Vide: H.R. Hall's "Ancient History of the Near East" pp. 364 *et seq.*). Ancient Egyptian kings bore names like Rameses I, Rameses II, Rameses III etc., resembling the name of Rama who was the incarnation of God Vishnu.

In the island of Madagascar off the eastern coast of South Africa, most of the place names have affinities with that of Rama.

In regard to the Sahara desert in North Africa, geologists advance the theory that it is the dried-up bed of an ocean. Ocean in Sanskrit is *Saagara.* May it not be that the modern name *Sahaara* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *Saagara?* It is also said that when Sahara was under water, there were people all round its shores whose names were mostly Sanskritic. Some of them were said to be related to the lord of Kosala. (Vide Encyclopaedia Brittannica Vol. XXIII, under *Sahara*).

In far off Mexico, they celebrate a festival called *Rama Sita.* The time of the festival corresponds to our Dussara or Navaraatri period. (Vide p. 56

of the Text and Plate 24 in T.W.F. Gann's "*The Maya Indians of Southern Yucatan, North and British Honduras*"). Excavations made in that country have brought to light a number of Ganesa idols. (Baron Humboldt quoted in Harbilas Sarda's '*Hindu Superiority*' p. 151). The ancient inhabitants of those parts were *Aastikas,* (i.e. those who believed in the Vedas), a term which still lingers in its corruption as *Aztecs,* as the people there are now called.

In Peru, in West South America, the inhabitants were Sun-worshippers. Their principal festivals of the year fell on the solstices (vide—*Asiatic Researches* Vol. I p. 426). They were known as the *Incas,* from *Ina* meaning the Sun.

We know the Puraanic story of the King Sagara and of his sixty thousand sons who were burnt to ashes by the sage Kapila. The princes dug the earth to go to *paataala loka* in their search for the sacrificial horse which they found near the sage Kapila who was engaged in *tapas.* As they offended him, he looked at them with angry eyes and they were reduced to ashes. *Paataala loka* corresponds to the Antipodes of India, namely America. May not *California* there be *Kapila Aranya?* The probability is strengthened by the fact that there is an Ash Mountain Park in California and a Horse Island in Alaska in North America.

Figures 128 and 129 on page 621 of the book, "*The Native Tribes of Central Australia*" by Spencer and Gillen (Macmillan, 1899) depicted a kind of dance said to be current among the wild native tribes of Australia. The dance is described in the book as "*Siva's Dance*". On closer exa-

mination, the dancers appear to have painted on their foreheads a third eye, a fact suggestive of the possibility that the people of even such distant lands as Australia were acquainted with our Vedic lore and Vedic gods.

In the Eastern Archipelago, evidences of our religion are to be found. In Java, there are numerous relics of Hindu cult and worship. In Borneo there is a forest which used to be spoken of as Virgin Forest (Wallace: *The Malay Archipelago* pp. 44-45). A party of explorers discovered a stone which contained an inscription commemorating in detail the performance of some *yaagas* and *yajnas* by a certain king (*Yupa inscriptions of Mula Varman of Koeti, Borneo*).

All these evidences serve to show that our religion was once prevalent throughout the globe. It may have been that for causes which we are not able to ascertain, the tenets and practices of our religion began to decline in other parts and their prevalence came to be confined to the land of their origin originally known as Bhaarata Varsha, India. When it lapsed into oblivion in other countries, and when due to lack of any religious consciousness, the people became godless and unethical, there arose in those lands great prophets who brought to light one aspect or another of this forgotten religion. They declared themselves to be founders of *new* religions and came to be revered as such. But it must be noted that the fundamental moral principles underlying these *new* religions only emphasised some feature or other of the universal Vedic religion with certain theological variations.

## III. "AGE" OF THE VEDAS

It is customary to speak of the 'Age' of the Vedas. The sacred books of Buddhism, Christianity and Islam have dates assigned to them by the votaries of the respective religions. The Buddhist *Tripitakas* are said to have been written about the time of Asoka, though according to certain authorities, Buddha's age can be carried to many centuries earlier. The *New Testament* originated about 2,000 years ago. The Koran which is the Word of God conveyed to the Prophet was written about 1,200 years ago. All these holy books have historical dates assigned to them. But it is different with the Vedas. No one can say with any certainty when they came into being. Yet, Orientalists are anxious to discover when they were 'composed'. Some of them say it was in 1,500 B. C. Others say, 3,000 B. C. Lokmanya Tilak fixed it at 6,000 B. C. and some Orientalists agree with him and others differ from him. Modern Orientalists are inclined to bring the date further down.

Buddhism revolted against the Vedas and the Buddhists criticised them. They themselves did not know when the Vedas 'began'. Buddha was born 2,500 years ago, and he too did not know when the Vedas 'came to be'. The Vedas are *anaadi* and *nitya* (beginningless and eternal). Sound (*sabda*) which is the framework of the Vedas is eternal. According to us, creation and dissolution of the universe, *srishti* and *pralaya* alternate. At a fresh creation after a *pralaya,* the eternal sound is caught

through their ears by the Vedic seers (*mantra drashtaarah*) and they transmit them to the world.

A method to determine the 'age' of the Vedas is said to be based on the evidence of styles of the Hindu scriptures as they changed from the Vedas through the Upanishads and the Sutras to the Kaavya literature. In the case of any spoken language, it is computed that it undergoes modifications gradually with the passage of every 200 years. Taking Tamil, for an example, the Tamil of modern times is different from that of the Sangham Age. It is a far cry from Old English to Modern English as we see it in England. American English is different from the orthodox English of the Londoner. The style of writing and speaking a particular language undergoes modification through the passage of time. On this basis, allowing a difference of 200 years for the wearing out of an old style and the emergence of a new style, it is roughly estimated, calculating backwards, that the Vedas should have been written 1,500 years before Christ.

Vessels used in Maths and in big temples are in daily use to prepare food for hundreds of people. Constantly put over the oven, scrubbed and cleaned, they wear out and have to be repaired or replaced. On the other hand, in every rich man's house, there are some big vessels which are used only on rare occasions like marriage feasts and they are put away after such use. They are scarcely in need of repair; they are generally intact. In old days, before the introduction of the pipe system to provide water, wells near railway stations and other places of public resort were the only source of water for the use of people. Many dents will

be found on the tops of the protecting walls of these much-used wells. The abutting walls of wells raised near places where there is pipe-water supply are not worn out, but are as whole and entire as when they were first built.

These point to the fact that things wear out by use, and gradually lose their original shape and form. But, what is carefully or sparingly used, *what is not handled by all and sundry,* is as it was in the beginning. The same is true of language also. English, Tamil or Hindi, any language for that matter, has changed its style through the centuries, being commonly used in all sorts and manner of ways leading to its being worn out and distorted.

But it is remarkable that the language of the Vedas today is the same in form and feature as it was since time immemorial. There has been no distortion or deterioration. The reason for this is that the Vedic chanting has been so carefully guarded as not to allow any possibility of a lapse or change from its pristine form. This has been secured by the several devices mentioned earlier. Making a rough 'estimate' of the so-called 'date' of the Vedas is to go on an 'evidence' which has no bearing on the Vedas. Not only have the Vedas been without a beginning, but they have continued in their identical form through the eons of successive periods of deluge and creation alternating with each other.

The word *Veda* comes from the root *Vid,* to know. The Vedas are a body of knowledge, a sum of Truths. Truth is not man-made. Truth exists for ever, from an infinite past. What man can do and has done is only to perceive the Truth, to

receive it, to understand it, to utter it in words and to convey it to others. The great sages of the past perceived these Truths with the 'eyes of their soul'. They are known as *mantradrashtaarah,* those who intuited the Truths. They were highly spiritual personages who tuned their higher consciousness to catch the eternal Truths ever present in the firmament through the *divyasrotram* stated in the *Yoga Sutras* and they spoke them forth in the form of the several Vedas. The various parts of the Vedas are associated with the names of distinct sages, not because they were their authors, but for the reason that those sages received the Truths and gave expression to them. Not only the ideas of these Truths, but even the language and the words and letters in their particular sequences and the manner of their utterance were thus *received* by them.

The process of intuiting and receiving the Vedic sounds is analogous to that in a radio receiving apparatus. Tuned to particular wave lengths, it is able to receive sound waves of appropriate frequencies. The rishis too tuned their minds by the practice of Yoga to receive these eternal sounds which are not audible to the physical ear. This is even as Sri Krishna endowed Arjuna with divine eyes (*divya chakshus*) to be able to see His *visvaroopa*. The Yoga-Sastra speaks of the method of acquiring this power by the spiritual process of *srotraakaasa samyama.*

## IV. CONTENTS OF THE VEDAS

The Vedas represent what should be *known* and acted upon to enable a man to attain liberation. It is a cardinal principle of our religion that suffering and sorrow of every one should be overcome by realising one's true nature, by a knowledge of one's true self, namely God. Our scriptures provide such knowledge in various ways suited to the status and capacity of the person seeking it. The sources of such knowledge are called *Vidyaasthaanas*. Says a verse:

*angaani vedaascatvaarah meemamsaa nyaaya vistaarah*
*puraanam dharmasaastram cha vidyaa hyetaaschaturdasa*

Another verse says:

*puraana nyayameemamsaa dharmasaastraangamisritaah*
*vedaah sthaanaani vidyaanaam dharmasya cha chaturdasa*

These fourteen sacred books or *Vidyaasthaanas* are:

1 to 4 The four Vedas
5 to 10 The six Vedaangas
11 Meemaamsaa
12 Nyaaya
13 The Puraanas
and 14 The Dharma Saastras.

The Tamil Tevaaram praises God by saying: He became the Vedas and the six angas; (*Vedamodu aarangam aayinaanai*).

The most important of these scriptural texts are the Vedas, They are said to be infinite (*anantaavai Vedaah*). About 5,000 years ago, at the conjunction of the Dvaapara Yuga and the Kali Yuga, the sage Vyaasa is said to have classified the

Vedas into four parts. It is to be noted that we have little or no knowledge of the identity of the great personages of our religion. They have assumed anonymity under the feeling that their work is more important than themselves. *Vyaasa* literally means a 'compiler'. As the Vedas are too extensive and manifold to be mastered in the span of a single human life, Vyaasa divided them into four parts with the object that it might be possible for a person to master at least one branch (Saakha) of it. He took care to see that each saakha contained all that was necessary for one's life and liberation. His four disciples, Paila, Vaisampaayana, Jaimini and Sumantu learnt under him the Rg, Yajus, Saama and Atharva Vedas. Each of the Vedas is divided into two portions, the Samhita, which is another name for the Mantra portion, and the Braahmanas. The word *Mantra* comes from *man* (*a* in *man* pronounced like *u* in *but*) meaning to *think*. The meaning of the mantra is intended to be meditated upon for attaining spiritual wisdom. In sacrifices, the mantras are required to be recited on various occasions along with the act of offering oblations.

The Rg Veda is generally in poetic form. The Yajur Veda has more of prose than poetry and is used in worship (from Yaj: to worship or to sacrifice). There are two main versions of this Veda known as the *Krishna* or Black Yajus and the *Sukla* or White Yajus. The first is of the School of the Taittireeyins and the second belongs to the Vaajasaneyins. The Saama Veda consists entirely of stanzas (excepting 75) taken from the Rg Veda and arranged solely with reference to their place

in the Soma sacrifice. They are intended to be sung during the sacrifice and so, they are called the Book of Chants. It is known as *Saama gaan*. These three Vedas, the Rg, the Yajus and the Saama are known as *trayee*, a collection of three. The Atharva Veda contains occult mantras for acquiring mysterious powers.

The *Braahmanas* give directions for the performance of the sacrifices and the explanation of words, formulas and hymns which are difficult to be understood. They show the connection between the hymn and the ceremony with reference to which it is recited. They consist of two parts, the *Vidhis* prescriptions or directions for the performance of the sacrifice and *arthavaadas* or explanations.

The last portion of the Braahmanas is taken up with a part of the Vedas known as *Aaranyakas* which include in themselves some of the famous *Upanishads*. As their name implies, they are *forest treatises*. They are intended for the use of pious men who have retired to the forest. Owing to the superior sanctity of their contents, they are to be communicated in the seclusion and solitude of the forest. As the Aaranyakas are part of the Braahmanas, the Vedas may be said to be of two groups the Samhitas and the Braahmanas.

The Upanishads deal with spiritual knowledge as such. They are said to constitute the *jnaana kaanda*. These are a series of dissertatory treatises about Man, Nature and God or the Supreme Reality and the relation between them. They also describe the mental disciplines by which man is enabled to realise the Supreme and obtain release from the bond of successive births.

## V. THE SPIRITUAL PATH

### 1. KARMAANUSHTHANA

The entire course of a Hindu's spiritual life has been succinctly stated in the Pentad of Instruction known as the *Upadesa Panchaka* of Sri Sankara. It is a cardinal tenet of our faith that the present life of any man should be the last in the succession of infinite lives that he has had in the history of his soul. The soul by itself is incorporeal; its association with the body is due to the operation of *avidya,* or nescience which itself is beginningless. The present life of every man is a glorious opportunity to be used in such a manner that there will be no more lives hereafter. The death that will come inevitably at the end of this life must be the last, and the soul surviving that should not thereafter enter into another body by the operation of the Law of Karma. Since residual karma brings the soul in conjunction with the body, all karma should be liquidated, burnt out, with the body of the present life. It is to this end that every man must strive.

For this purpose, says Sankara, following the Vedas every one must go through certain disciplines. They refer to work, worship and wisdom, Karma, Bhakti and Jnaana. All spirituality must be firmly established on a high moral code, which involves the doing of what is prescribed and the avoidance of what is prohibited. Frequently in the context of our daily life, we have to determine the nature of our duties. Kumarila Bhatta, the great

Meemaamsaka posed the question: What is Dharma? What is its ground? Ordinarily we say that the Laws of a State determine our duties. These laws are the enactments of a legislature which is a part of our Constitution. Who gave the authority to this Constitution? It was drawn up by the representatives elected by the people. It does not require much argument to show that the voters are of various kinds of intellectual and moral calibre and that the representatives whom they return are not always the best. That is inevitable in this imperfect world. We also see that in some cases Law and Justice do not coincide. Our courts are called Courts of Law. They are not Courts of Justice in the strict sense of that expression. Not unoften, our judges feel helpless in the face of an unjust law, and, in their decisions, they recommend that the law may be modified in consonance with the requirements of justice.

The enactments of legislatures regulate public conduct. But what about individual morality? What is the criterion of personal action, of what a man should do by himself and for himself? In our religion it has been declared that in matters of conduct one should be guided by the ordinances of the Vedas. *Vedokhilo dharma moolam*: the Veda is the source of all Dharmas. The Vedas are authorless, *apaurusheya;* they are not man-made. They are intuitions of Yogic sages into eternal Truths.

Suppose a situation arises in which no guidance can be obtained from the Vedas. Many of the Vedas have been lost. If the extant Vedic texts cannot guide us in our conduct, it is prescribed that

we should look for guidance to the writings of sages like Manu, Yaajnavalkya, Paraasara and others who have left behind what may be called *aides memoire* or *Smritis* which should determine our conduct. There is a mistaken belief that the authors of these Smritis were law-*givers*. That is wrong. They did not enunciate *new* laws. *Smriti* implies what is *remembered*. *Smriti* is a record of the memory of the sages of the Vedic texts including what might have been lost in the passage of time. Smriti follows and is in accord with *Sruti* or the Vedas. Kaalidaasa picturesquely conveyed this when he said that the queen Sudakshina *followed* her husband, King Dileepa, and walked a little distance *behind* him, as he took the cow Nandini to graze in the forest, with accordant mind even as the Smriti follows the footsteps of Sruti. *Sruterivaartham smritiranvagacchat*. Thus we have the authority of Kaalidaasa, the *mahaakavi*, our national poet for saying that Smritis derive their authority from the Vedas and that their ordinances are not man-made with the possibility of error or liability to be set at nought.

Suppose again that there are no Smriti texts to guide us at a crisis, what are we to do? The conduct of those who know the *Smiriti, seelascha tadvidaam* is to be observed and we must act accordingly. As these persons who know the Smritis are well-versed in the eternal basic principles of conduct, their declarations are expected to be in tune with the spirit of the Sruti. But when persons well-versed in Smritis are not available, we have to model our conduct on the virtuous actions of *good people, aachaaraascha saadhoonaam*. Sadhus

are good people who are pure in heart. If these exemplars too are not to be had to instruct us in the determination of our conduct on a particular occasion, then we have to abide by the intimation of a *pure conscience*: *aatmanastushtirevacha.* Pray to God for guidance with a pure and devout heart and act in accordance with the light that you then obtain. That is how Dushyanta in Kaalidaasa's *Saakuntala,* approved of his own decision to make love to Kanva's daughter. He said:

*Sataam hi sandehapadeshu vastushu*
*pramaanamantahkaranapravrttayah.*

'In cases of doubt, when there is no other approved means to solve it, the good people rely on the voice of conscience.'

From the above, it will be clear that the appeal to conscience or the inner voice must be made only when all the other forms of guidance that have been enumerated, namely, Sruti, Smriti, the way of life of those well-versed in Smriti and the example of good men are not available. Then, and *only then,* can we act as our conscience bids us act. Now-a-days, however, the fashion is to make it all topsy-turvy, to give the first place to what is called one's conscience relegating all the other prescribed guidances to a secondary place, or, as is often done, to condemn them as meaningless and irrational. The ancient view, however, about the *pramaanas,* or criteria of dharma has stood the test of time. It has the support of *mahaakavis* who, as their name connotes, can see farther than others. (*kavih kraantadarsee*).

In order, therefore, to know what may be done and what may not be done, we must be guided by

the pronouncements of the Vedas which state prescriptions *vidhis* and prohibitions *nishedas*. Sri Krishna said in the Gita:

*yaha saastravidhimutsrjya vartate kaamakaarathah*
*na sa siddhimavapnoti na sukham na paraamgatim.*
XVI 23

'He, who, having cast aside the injunctions of the saastras, acts according to his own sweet will, attains not perfection, or happiness or the highest goal.'

'Therefore,' says Sri Krishna, 'let the saastra be your authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done. Knowing what has been prescribed in the saastra, you should perform your action here.'

*tasmaat saastram pramaanam te kaaryaakaarya vyavasthithau.*
*jnaatvaa saastravidhaanoktam karma kartumihaarhasi.*
XVI-24

Thus, to know how we should act in the course of our lives, we must turn for guidance ultimately to saastra, i.e. the Vedas. To know what the Vedas say, it is necessary to learn them and keep uttering them everyday lest, by reason of their not being put to writing, they should be forgotten. Therefore, Sri Sankara opened his *Pentad of Instruction* with the words :

*Vedonityam adheeyataam.*

The Vedas should be learnt and kept alive in the utterance every day.

Having learnt them, the next thing which follows is:

*taduditam karma svanushteeyataam*

The duties prescribed by them should be properly performed. What will be the result of such good conduct according to the Vedas? God is pleased by it. *tena eesasya vidheeyataam apachitih.* 'Discharge well and truly', says Sri Sankara, 'the karma which is yours, and that will be worship most pleasing to the Lord'.

To lead a good life, we must get rid of evil in our mind, speech and conduct. To this end, we must be continuously engaged in thinking good thoughts and doing good deeds prescribed by the saastras. An old sanyaasi was asked how he overcame the promptings of lust, *kaama.* He replied that when kaama knocked at his mind's door, it found him so busy that it went away of its own accord. An idle mind is the devil's workshop. If we are always busy with good deeds, evil will not come near us. In the very process of doing good deeds, the evil automatically vanishes from our mind. Doing good deeds keeps us constantly thinking of God and thereby we earn His grace all the more. Singing of God Varadaraaja of Kaanchi, Sri Appayya Deekshitar, the philosopher-devotee said:

> 'There may be other poets, O Lord! who can compose verses in Thy name very quickly. I am a slow poet. But my good fortune is greater than theirs. For, while I struggle to versify, my mind lingers for a longer time on the features of Thy resplendent Person.

So, the first stage in the spiritual ladder is the due performance of the obligatory duties prescribed in the saastras. This should be done not with a view to enjoy the fruits of those actions; but purely from a sense of duty and in a spirit of dedication to God. This *karmaanushtaanam* gives

mental purity and also makes one eligible for God's grace. The loyal fulfilment of one's own individual Dharma is true praise and true worship of the Lord.

## 2. Devotion to God

A spiritual man is one who lives his days in contemplation of God. What is God? In every religion God is referred to as the creator. He is spoken of as the *kartaa*. He is said to be responsible for the creation of the world and its maintenance. Every effect must have a cause. The ultimate cause is God. Further, God is the dispenser of the fruits of our actions, whether they are good or evil. God is known as *karmaphaladaataa*.

God may be the creator of the world and also the dispenser of the fruits of our actions. But why should we have devotion to Him ? Why should we show *bhakti* to Him? The answer to this question is provided in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. Yoga is defined as *chittavrttinirodha*. It is the control of the mind's activity. But how to control the mind? This can be brought about by worship of God. The world is full of things which distract the mind, which make it shake and waver. To keep our body in balance without being tossed about, we hold fast to a strong pillar. Even so, to keep our mind steady, we should make it stick to something that is unchanging and unshakable. It must be something that is fixed, *sthaanu*, unmoving and permanent among the unstable things of the world. God who is the all-knowing Intelligence is the One Per-

manent in this world of impermanent things. We should hold Him before our mind to control it and steady it like a flame in a place where there is no breeze.

If you meditate on a thing with concentration, you acquire its qualities, and, at last, you become that thing itself. Meditation on God who is omniscient, who is unaffected by want and unmoved by desire, makes one like God Himself. To steady oneself even as God is steady, one should have devotion to God. Saint Tiruvalluvar says that we must attach ourselves to Him who has no attachments to rid ourselves of all attachments. Attach yourself to God to be detached from the world.

What really is the core of bhakti? It is the condition of mind which is continuously drawn to and anchored in the feet of the Lord of all creatures, the *Pasupati*. Sri Sankara has a verse which brings out the nature of bhakti by a few beautiful examples from Nature and human relations.

*Ankolam nijabeejasantatih.* It is traditionally believed that there is a tree called the *ankola* tree. Its seeds fall down from the full-grown tree. By some internal compulsion of its nature, it moves of its own accord towards the foot of the parent tree. Having reached it, it gently ascends clinging to the trunk and eventually *becomes one with it.*

*Ayaskaantopalam soochikaa.* The needle is drawn to the loadstone, gets magnetised by it and *becomes itself a magnet.*

*Saadhvee naijavibhum.* A *pativrataa* woman intensely longs with all her heart and soul for the company of her lord *who is all the world to her.*

*Lataa kshitiruham.* A creeper meandering on

the ground is on the look out for a tree to twine itself round. Having found it, *it envelops it* on all sides and cannot be separated from it even with great force.

*Sindhussaridvallabham.* The rivers which take rise in distant mountains rush forth with turbulent avidity to flow into the sea. The rivers *become one with the waters of the sea* and their water becomes salty even as the sea water is salty.

The attraction in all these cases is natural and spontaneous, not a calculated or artificial one. At the start they feel separate from that to which each of them is attracted. But they cannot subsist in their separation. The seed, the needle, the *saadhvee*, the creeper and the rivers find the fulfilment of their being in the *union* and eventually, in their *identity* with that which alone makes for their completion. To the *saadhvee* i.e. the *pativrataa,* the true wife, her husband is her all. He is her very life. Separation from him even for a second causes her intense anguish. The rivers rise on mountain tops, where clouds pour out what they took out from the sea, their original source and the ultimate goal. They flow in torrents and fall in cascades, roaring with fury betokening their eagerness to meet their lord, the *saridvallabha* and then they *merge in its bosom.*

In these successive ways does the true devotee pine for God and draw himself to Him. The final example illustrates the intense thoroughness of devotional attraction with the background of the ultimate Advaitic truth. Devotion is the link between the devotee and Deity. The devotee is unhappy in separation

from God. He longs for union with the Supreme Being. Separation signifies duality, *dvaitabhaava*. The goal of bhakti is the annulment of duality and the attainment of oneness, a-dvaita bhaava. The ankola seed becomes one with the tree indistinguishable from it. The creeper twines round the tree for the rest of its life. The needle getting magnetised itself becomes a magnet. The *saadhvee* loses her separate individuality in the personality of her *pati*, her lord. All the rivers of different names and forms lose their distinctness when they become one with the sea. What was the river water becomes the sea-water.

These examples also show that God is our source and our sanctuary. Ultimately, being oneself is to realise one's true Self which is God. That is the consummation of bhakti. True prayer is not asking for this and that which are alien to us, which are things outside of us. The true devotee prays to God to give Himself to himself. "Give me my own nature" *madeeyam eva svaroopam dehi*. In the last analysis, since each man's true nature is God Himself, 'Give me to myself' means 'give Thyself to me'.

This truth is wonderfully brought out in another prayer that Sri Sankara sang in his *Saundaryalahari*. The prayer starts with the words

*Bhavaani tvam daase mayi vitara drshtim sakarunaam.*

Addressing the Mother of the universe as Bhavaani, Sri Sankara prays: 'Be pleased to cast Thy gracious look on me, Thy servant'. The interesting words here are, 'Bhavaani tvam', which mean 'Oh Bhavani! Thou' (mayest be pleased to shed

Thy gracious look on me.) Here 'Bhavaani' is the vocative case; it apostrophises the Supreme Mother with one of Her names. 'Tvam' means Thou and in the sentence functions as the grammatical subject of what is to follow. But, 'Bhavaani' is also a verb in the first person singular future tense which means 'may I become' and 'tvam' means 'Thou'. The first two words of the prayer can also mean 'May I become Thou'. Sri Sankara says that as soon as the Supreme Mother hears these first two words of Her devotee's prayer, without waiting for what was to follow, she immediately (*tadaiva*) bestows on him identity with Herself, *nijasaayujyapadaveem*. Giving up the duality consciousness (*dvaitabhaava*) of a servant (*daasa*), the devotee attains the Advaita stage of oneness with the Supreme. That is the ultimate goal of bhakti.

One way of worshipping God is to consider our body as the temple of God and whatever we do as itself worship of God. In another prayer, one addressed to Siva, Sri Sankara bids us think as follows in relation to Siva:

> My inner atman is Thou alone. My buddhi is Thy consort. My praanas are Thy companions.
> My body is Thy temple. The way in which I enjoy the things of the senses is Thy worship.
> My sleep is samaadhic contemplation of Thee;
> My wanderings are the circumambulation of Thee.
> All that I talk is praise of Thee.
> Whatever I do is worship of Thee.

If a man leads his life with this prayer in his mind, there will be no evil in his thought, speech or action and he will live a pure and dedicated life.

Thus, due discharge of the duties enjoined by

the saastras and continuous contemplative devotion to God are the means to evoke God's grace for making our lives fruitful of the highest spirituality.

Prayer is an important element of bhakti. The purpose of prayer is not to petition for benefits. Need we tell God to give us what we want? Being omniscient, does He not know what we want? Or, does He wait to be approached and petitioned to? To believe that God does not know or waits to be told will detract from His omniscience and His mercy.

But then why do we petition in prayer? Neelakantha Deekshita said addressing Goddess Meenakshi at Madurai:

> 'Am I going to tell You what You do not know? Yet if what must be told is left unsaid, the affliction in the heart will remain unhealed.
> So, give ear to what I say.'

The purpose of prayer is to find relief from the heart-aches of life by communicating with One who will give ear to what is said and who alone can heal them.

For what should we pray to God? We may have all the goods of the world; but none of them will give us satisfaction if the mind is not at peace. We must pray for freedom from distraction. This mental peace will arise only if our mind is conditioned by the removal of certain qualities and the injection of others. In the famous *Shatpadeestotra*, Sri Sankara beseeches God as follows:

> *(avinayamapanaya) Oh Lord! remove my avinaya, whatever does not make for humility.*

*(damaya manah) Control my mind*

*(samaya vishayatrshnaam) Stifle my thirst for sensuous enjoyment*

*(vistaaraya bhootadayaam) Expand my concern for all beings.*

Surely, if a man is helped to shake off his pride, control his mind, restrain his senses and feel an inclusive love for everything in the world, he will automatically attain *saanti,* peace of mind and cross the sea of *samsaara.* This must be the prayer on the lips of every one.

A true devotee of God does not complain when he undergoes suffering. Sufferings are natural to man. In their afflictions, many persons complain against God that He is blind to their distresses and they even get angry with Him. They forget the many benefits that they have derived from Him like food, clothing, shelter etc. Could they have had them without His grace? Instead of acknowledging these with joy and gratitude, they complain of a few afflictions which they do not wish to endure. They forget that the so-called sufferings are visited on them for their good. When a mother binds the hands of her child to keep it from eating mud, the child weeps; but the mother laughs, and the child gets angry. The good things that we get from God are signs of His grace. The sufferings have been invited on ourselves by ourselves. In fact, our troubles are ways in which God saves us from ourselves. Suffering is the medicine of life. When we suffer, we should pray to God to give us the strength to endure the suffering. A true bhakta is undisturbed by suffering.

## 3. Acquisition Of Jnaana

*Jnaana* or wisdom is the supreme solvent of all suffering. Suffering is the mental state of a man arising out of the wrong identification of his *aatma* with his body. This is known as *dehaatma-buddhi*. The real self of a person is the permanent and imperishable fact of his nature. It is called the *aatman*. It is the 'I' of a man. It is not to be confused with his body. By proper training one should learn to detach the *aatman* from the body and its parts. The sense of the 'I' must be separated from the body. When this happens, the sufferings will be understood as pertaining to the body and the person will be unaffected by them. Having thus separated his *aatman* from the body, the spiritual aspirant learns under the guidance of a competent teacher to realise his oneness with the Supreme by meditation on the scriptural declaration: This *aatman is Brahman*. Ultimately he attains to the unitive consciousness with the Supreme and has the ecstatic experience of his non-difference from *Brahman*. Having attained this goal of unitive consciousness with the Supreme, nothing remains to be deemed higher than that. This is the stage of the highest wisdom. One who has acquired it is a true jnaani. Such a *jnaani* is unshaken even by the most acute sufferings. This is affirmed by Sri Krishna in the Gita:

*yam labdhvaa cha aparam laabham manyate naadhikam tatah*
*yasminsthitho na duhkhena gurunaapi vichaalyate.*

Even a little wisdom helps us to see things in their proper perspective. It is not uncommon to

see certain people treat their own sufferings and sorrows lightly. When sympathised with in their affliction, they say: 'Oh, it is nothing; it is all God's *sankalpa*.' They exhibit patience and peace which helps them to bear their sufferings with cheer and fortitude. Time is a great healer. The agonies of today pale into nothingness after a lapse of years. When he has to face present suffering, the *jnaani* looks on it with a mind of thirty years hence and laughs at it. By that, suffering loses its sting for him. He cultivates a detachment like unto that which an ordinary man generally exhibits for the sufferings of a man in another part of the globe. The *jnaani* separates himself at present from his suffering by such a distance both of time and place.

In our scheme, the guru is equated with God. It is said:

*yasya deve paraa bhaktih yathaa deve tathaa gurau*
*tasyaite kathitahyartthaah prakaasante mahaatmanah*

To him who has devotion to God and a like devotion to his guru, to him all that is said (and also all that is not said), *kathitahyartthaah* (and *akathitahyartthah*), become clear in his mind.

The guru is all the gods. He is invoked as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. The daily prayer to the guru takes the form:

*gururbrahmaa gururvishnurgururdevo maheshvarah*
*gurussaakshaat parambrahma tasmai sreeguravenamah.*

Looking upon the guru as God Himself, the spiritual aspirant impresses him by his humility, his earnestness and his ministrations, and obtains his grace. Pleased with the aspirant, the guru initiates him into the ultimate spiritual Truth on which the

pupil meditates and realises It himself. As the *Upadesapanchaka* has it, *brahmaasmeeti vibhaavyataam*: He contemplates: 'I am Brahman' and finally stands as a realised soul, as witness to the identity of the individual with the Supreme: *parabrahmaatmanaa stheeyataam.*

This final realisation is the result of *jnaana* of the Supreme Truth received from the guru and contemplated on by the pupil. In that state, one is freed from the shackles of life and is said to be liberated even while one is alive. This state is called *jeevanmukti.* This is the goal of the spiritual path laid out in our religion.

## VI. THE GITA WAY

The Lord instructs Arjuna in different ways and concludes: 'Therefore fight, Oh! Bharata. 'Fight for this reason; and for this reason.' Thus, he gives him many reasons why he should fight. 'To fight is your dharma; so go and fight. Do your karma', says Krishna. Thus Krishna instructs Arjuna that to fight is the appointed karma of Arjuna. He speaks in praise of him who does his karma:

*yajnaarthaat karmanaanyatra lokoyam karmabandhanah*
*tadartham karma kaunteya muktasanghah samaachara.*

The karma should be done in a spirit of dedication to God. 'Do your karma and offer it to God'. Every person should perform the karmas prescribed for him. The Lord describes the karmas appropriate to each person. The criterion to determine one's proper karma is provided, says the Lord, by *saastra*

*tasmaat saastram pramaanam te*
*kaaryaakaarya vyavasthitau*

'Consult the saastras if you would know what is proper for you to do. You should do what is ordained in the saastras. You are a kshatriya. To fight is the ordained karma of a kshatriya.'

From this it would appear that the main teaching of Krishna is the performance of karma. Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak has expounded the Gita as the Gospel of Work. The Lord's words also seem to support this view. He says again and

again: "Fight, that is your dharma. Every one should stick to his dharma."

*svakarmanaa tamabhyarchya* "Worshipping God by due observance of one's karma".

*yajnaarthaat karmanonyatra.* Here the word *yagna* has been understood to mean Lord Vishnu Himself, the supreme Paramaatman. *Yagna* is also taken to mean 'sacrifice'. 'Do your karma with the consciousness that there is God and dedicate what you do to Him'.

All this would indicate that the Gita gives predominance to karma only.

But, there are passages in the Gita with a contrary import.

*tooshneem kinchidachintayan*

'Do not think of anything; sit down holding your breath'.

*moordhanyaadhaaya aatmanah praanam*

'Lodge your breath in your head and meditate on the nature of the Supreme'.

*yah sarvatraanabhisnehah tattat praapya subhaasubham*
*naabhinandati na dveshti tasya prajnaa pratishtitaa.*
and
*yastvaatmaratireva syaat aatmatruptascha maanavah*
*aatmanyeva cha santushtah tasya kaaryam na vidyate*

These verses say that for him whose mind is controlled, there is no thought or speech, no sight or hearing. For him who is in *samaadhi* there is nothing to do—*tasya kaaryamana vidyate.*

Again, the Lord says: Do not live amidst crowds. Seek a secluded spot. Go to the solitude of a mountain or a forest. Do not talk to any one. Thus too does the Lord teach.

If one should live far away from human haunts, how to fight then? How to reconcile the

command to fight with seeking solitude? But the Lord says this and that too!

In another place He says:: *Vaasudeva sarvam iti.* He praises the rare souls who see the same Supreme Being in all things.

'Sit alone; do not eat too much. He who eats much cannot perform yoga: *nastysanatastu yogah.* But do not starve yourself: *nachaikaantamanasnatah.*'

Looked at this way, the Gita seems to abound in contradictions. Attempts have been made by saints and scholars to resolve the contradictions. These have taken the form of subordinating any two of *karma, bhakti* and *jnana* to the third, to showing that one of them is the primary path and that the others are ancillary to it.

There is a statement in the Gita which provides the key to reconciliation of the seeming contradictions.

*sve sve karmanyabhiratah samsiddhim labhate narah*

'Let each perform the karmas appropriate to him as prescribed in the saastras. Doing them, let him offer them to God'.

What will be the result if the karmas are performed in this fashion and in this spirit? One's mind will be purified. *Chittasuddhi* will be effected.

Is this *chittasuddhi* itself *moksha?* If that is so, it will be enough if karmas are performed. There will be no need for *bhakti, yoga* and *jnana* spoken of in the Gita.

The Lord adds:

*svakarmaniratah siddhim yathaavindati, tacchrunu*

'I shall tell you how he who has *chittasuddhi* attains

the stage of fruition.' This *chittasuddhi* is the *means* to the realisation of the Supreme. It is the basic stage for further advance. First purity of mind; then mind control; thus the steps follow one upon the other.

A man gives way to grief; he weeps. Or he is afraid. Or he is overcome by lust. What does all that mean? It means that he has not attained *chittasuddhi*. It is only if one is free from sorrow, anger, lust, delusion etc. that one can come into direct communion with God. To get *chittasuddhi* each one must do his proper karma. 'You are a kshatriya', says the Lord, 'so, do your karma. Fight'.

'Fulfil completely and properly all your karmas; by that means get rid of all the passions which foul your mind, dejection, delusion, desire, anger, hatred, envy, lust, everything. Subdue your senses. Your mind will become pure. Then the path to Perfection will be easy. So, karma must be performed to acquire purity of mind.

The Lord proceeds:

*siddhim praapto yadaa brahma tadaapnoti nibodha me*
*samaasenaiva kaunteya nishtaa jnaanasya yaa paraa*

'I shall then tell you how the realisation of the Supreme which is the goal of jnaana ensues upon the attainment of *chittasuddhi*. *Chittasuddhi* leads to *yogasiddhi* which in turn paves the way to *jnaanasiddhi*. Upon the attainment of the final stage of *jnaanasiddhi*, one realizes the Supreme; he is transformed into that Supreme. Speech itself is stilled there; for, there is no *other* to speak to in that stage. So, at the stage of Perfection there is no

distinction of friend or foe. There is no second there. Where there is no second, there can be no action. When one attains to that Universal, *tasya kaaryam na vidyate;* there is nothing for him to do. For, action requires a duality predicament.

But in the context of Arjuna's mental condition before the commencement of the war, his duty was to perform his karma and he could attain *chittasuddhi* only by doing his karma. He will then not grieve thinking he is injuring some one. He will stop weeping. He will be set on the road to Perfection. The first stage of that road is doing karma.

Bhakti or devotion ensues upon *chittasuddhi.* Says the Lord: It is by bhakti that you can know My real nature, who and what I am.

*bhaktyaa maam abhijaanaati*
*yaavaan yaschaasmi tattvatah.*
*tato maam tattvato jnaatva visate tadanantaram.*

If it is said that it is only by bhakti, one can know who and what God is, how to have bhakti to Him without knowing Him? To be devoted to someone you must know who he is. But Sri Krishna says: It is by bhakti that you can know Me. Is this not to indulge in a contradiction?

To have devotion, knowing about God is not a necessary pre-condition. At first, one starts with the idea: God is in this temple. He is in the sanctum of the temple. He is in the stone idol there. He is nowhere except there. Or, He is in that dome or *sikhara.*

In Vishnu temples there is the custom of distributing to the devotees the food offered to God

as part of the worship. The food so distributed is called *prasaadam*. It is reverently received in the palms of the hands and eaten out of them. Then the palms are rubbed against pillars to rid them of whatever is sticking to them. Now, would the devotees rub their palms on the pillar if they felt that God was in the pillar? At that time, they are 'sure' God is *not* in that pillar! They feel that God is only in the stone image in the sanctum and not in the pillar!

Well, this thought is enough to start the devotion, the process of bhakti. It will do if one thinks of God at first as described in our classics as having a particular form, colour, clad in a particular way, as having four hands and wielding the conch, the discus and the mace. If one habituates oneself to go to the temple to see the God there and to think of Him this way, then true devotion will gradually develop. When this true devotion dawns, the knowledge will arise that God is not in the temple only, that He is immanent in all things. Then the devotee understands the true nature of God, what and who He is (*yaavaan yaschaasmi tattvatah*).

Even as Sri Krishna has expounded the stages to Perfection according to the level of an individual's capacity and attainment, so too if one starts with meditation on God in particularised forms and practises devotion to those forms, eventually, by that very devotion one can understand His universal infinitude. When this truth is known, (*tato maam tattvato jnaatvaa*),the Real that is infinite, that is formless and nameless, is realised. That Infinite that has no eyes or ears or legs can see with-

out eyes, hear without ears, and be everywhere without legs.

But, this highest knowledge is not necessary for the *initial stage* of *bhakti*. Before one can meditate on the unlimited, one must begin with the limited. If devotion ripens by this meditation on the limited, it will lead naturally to the knowledge of the unlimited.

The next step is to go from the *knowledge* of the unlimited to the *experience* of the unlimited. Then the devotee is no longer different from the Deity. He is one with God.

*tato maam tattvato jnaatva visate tadanantaram.*

The knower of Brahman *ipso facto* becomes Brahman. Prior to that, when practising devotion, it is enough if one has knowledge *of a sort* of God. Without such knowledge there can be no devotion. Starting with devotion to God limited by name and form, if one later realises the unlimited nature of God, the limited will then be transcended. Yet, to realise the unlimited, one must start with devotion to the limited.

Upon the realisation of the true nature of God through such *bhakti,* one ceases to be separate from Him: *visate tadanantaram.* That very moment, one becomes that God. The bhakta turned jnaani merges in the waters of the Infinite like a block of ice in water. The distinction of limited ice and unlimited water vanishes.

Rivers have different names and forms before they enter the ocean. Once they flow into it, their individualities disappear in the all-encompassing waters of the ocean.

Thus, the Lord instructs us through Arjuna as to what we should do in the different levels that we are in. To Arjuna, He says: In your present level, your duty is to fight; *tasmaat yuddhyasva bhaarata.* Do not give way to grief.

The Lord's instruction is suited to the status of each person and the stage that he has attained.

## VII. THE STRENGTH OF OUR RELIGION

Our religion is usually criticised and ridiculed for its so-called polytheism. 'What a host of gods and goddesses you worship!' is a gibe flung at us. All old religions were said to be polytheistic before the advent of the 'reformed' religion. Mohamed abolished the 'many gods' whom his tribesmen worshipped and established 'One God'.

To know the truth about anything, one must turn to the great Poets. They see farther and better than ordinary mortals. Baana and Kaalidaasa are two great poets of our land. Let us see what they say about our 'gods'. Speaking of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, Baana says that they are in essence the One God appearing in three forms for a threefold purpose, namely, creation, protection and dissolution determined respectively by the qualities of *rajas, sattva* and *tamas*. The One unborn (*aja*) takes a threefold shape for a threefold purpose. The three, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, are ultimately and essentially one only. Kaalidaasa says to the same effect, that one *moorti* appears as three and there is no distinction of superior or inferior among them. If the three, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are one in essence, by the same token, all gods of our pantheon are also one in the ultimate analysis.

But why do people wrangle saying that one deity is superior to the rest, that the deity whom they worship alone is the highest? A bridge across a river has a number of arches. To a man standing under one arch, all other arches will appear smaller than

the one he stands under. This arch will appear biggest to his eyes. Even so, to a votary of a particular deity, all other deities will appear inferior. But the truth is that all deities are manifestations of the One God. All arches are similarly constructed and have the same dimension.

Another poetical saying is as follows:

*'He whom the Saivas worship as Siva, the Vedaantins as Brahman, who is worshipped as the Buddha by the Buddhists, as the Creator by the Nayyaayikas, as Arhat by the Jains and as Karma by the Meemaamsakas, may that Hari give you the fruits that you desire".*

This again is affirmed in the words of the Lord in the *Gita* when he said:

*'Whatever may be the form in which each devotee seeks to worship Me with faith, I make their faith steadfast in that form alone'.*

We do not have 'many gods'. As a matter of fact, we think of God in many ways and worship Him in many forms. We give a separate name to each of these forms to help us in our acts of worship and contemplation. It is ONE that is conceived as three, and then as thirty-three, and then as thirty-three crores, signifying an infinity of forms in which the ONE can manifest itself and be worshipped according to the tastes and the capacities of the worshippers, and according to the innumerable varieties of functions of Divinity. The forms may be different; the names may be different; but the ultimate Truth that is Divinity, is ONE.

Because two people worship different manifestations of the One Supreme Being, there is no warrant for their quarrelling with each other. The

Siva Puraanas extol Siva and the Vishnu Puraanas extol Vishnu. But a proper understanding will remove the misconception. The praise of a particular manifestation in a puraana is to be understood in its context and not as absolute. How can there be a higher or lower, superior or inferior when in reality there are not two, but it is only One God manifesting differently? We must not forget that there are works which proclaim the oneness of Siva and Vishnu, of Hara and Hari. It has been declared that the enemies of Siva are the enemies of Vishnu too and *vice versa.*

Among us there is the concept of the *ishta-devataa,* of the particular form of God which one chooses for his worship and meditation. To get at the One Supreme, you must start from some manifestation of It, and you choose it as your *ishta devataa.* Another man may choose some other manifestation. As each progresses in his devotion and concentration, he will be led on to the One where the differences disappear. That has been the experience of great sages and saints. A true Siva bhakta has no quarrel with a true Vishnu bhakta.

In this connection, it is good to remember two devotional hymns, one in praise of Vishnu and the other in praise of Siva sung by devotees of the different persuasions. They are the *Tiruppaavai* of Aandaal and the *Tiruvembaavai* of Maanickavaachakar. Both of them deal with awakening the sleeping devotees of God from their slumber before dawn. The language and the substance of the two hymns show a remarkable similarity bringing forcibly to our minds that, in the ultimate ana-

lysis, from the point of the devotee and his devotion there need be no difference in respect of Siva or Vishnu. A devotee of one manifestation is a devotee of every other manifestation. That is the way to establish devotional harmony. All the theistic schools of our religion have stemmed from the Vedic religion which proclaimed: 'That which exists is One; the sages speak of it variously'. The substance is ultimately one; its shape and name may be as various as you please.

In the matter of the form that one chooses for one's worship, one goes by the practice in vogue, the *sampradaaya* in one's family. There is no need to give up one form of worship and adopt another. Similarly one need not give up the religion in which one is born and adopt another. The *apachaara* or sin in conversion is not so much in going to a new religion as in giving up the old religion in which one was born. The convert to another religion scorns at the God whom he was worshipping the previous day. This one thing is enough for his damnation. It has been said:

*poorvairaacharitam kuryaat anyathaa patitobhavet.*

One should observe the traditional practices in religion; else, he is a fallen man. Invitation to a new religion implies that all who lived before the birth of that religion did not attain salvation and also that salvation is denied to all those who do not belong to that religion. Obviously this is absurd. Even to ask a Saivite to turn a Vaishnavite or *vice versa* is also wrong. God is common to all religions, old as well as new. To ask a man to give up his old religion is, in fact, to ask him to give up

the God whom he worshipped. It is a sin against God. God accepts all forms of worship, even the unsophisticated forms (*avidhipoorvakam*). He ultimately turns the devotee to the high and holy path and takes him to Himself. For, the God of all religions and of all religious denominations is the same.

This explains why our religion is not a proselytising religion. We recognise that people born in several religions can attain salvation by the proper observance of the behests of their respective religions. Moreover, we do not determine the strength of our religion by the number of its followers. Our religion did not grow by propaganda. It lives only by the *anushtaana,* the observance of its votaries. Propaganda is a prescribed duty in other religions which practise conversion. With us it is the other way. In accordance with the dictum *naaprshtah kasyachit brooyaat,* 'one should not tell unasked', we are forbidden to carry our religion to those who do not seek to know it. It is not necessary that we should try to bring about uniformity in religions. Unity is what is important, not uniformity. There can be unity in diversity. There is such a unity in our religion in spite of the endless variety of its forms and features, the names given to the One God and the methods of worship. This variety has not impaired the integral unity of our faith. All of us are followers of the one Vedic religion. Born in a *sampradaaya* or tradition, each one of us follows it and that traditional path ultimately takes each to the common goal. That is true not only with the various forms of our faith, but with all the religions that exist

in the world today. When a passenger gets down from his train and comes out of the station, the drivers of different conveyances try to snatch his luggage and each tries to put him into his vehicle. The protagonist of each school of religious thought tries to attract men by saying that his school is the easiest and surest way to reach the truth. When it is realised that all paths in religion lead to the same goal, there will be no need to change the path one is already following. There cannot be hatred of a person following a different path. The temple, the form of the God installed in it, His name, the form of worship, all these may differ for different people due to differences of tastes (*rucheenaam vaichitryaat*). But what is required of one is to persist in the path one is following.

The strength of any religion depends on the spirituality, character and integrity of religious leaders. If the Vedic religion has survived many vicissitudes, it is because such religious leaders appeared in this land from time to time. In the course of history, many religions have arisen in different lands. The founder of each religion criticised the religion that was in vogue in his time and he sought to displace it by his own religion. Several religions have risen and fallen in the world and some of them have practically disappeared. How did they rise, and why did they fall? That is an interesting question. Each religion, as it rose, claimed the monopoly of truth and proclaimed that it contained the last word in true religion. Truth is only one; there cannot be two Truths. Yet, each religious leader was able to attract to himself a large following in his time. Is truth to be judged by

the number of people giving allegiance to a particular system?

This gives rise to the question: Is a religion popular because it is true; or, is it true because it is popular? Did people embrace a religion because it was true, and did a religion disappear because it was not true? A religion does not flourish only on account of the truth it proclaimed. The key to the growth of a religion lies in the cause of its later decay. In the farce known as *Mattavilaasa Prahasana,* written by King Mahendra Varma of Mahaabalipuram fame, there is a reference to the licentious habits of the Buddhist bhikshus of his day and their swerving from the high code of personal conduct laid down by the Buddha. When admitting women to his monastic order, the Buddha himself foresaw the inherent danger. The decline of Buddhism was, therefore, due to the failure of its adherents, particularly of those who had to set an example for others, to be true to the precepts and to strictly follow the practices of that religion. Conversely, a religion will continue to flourish if it can continuously claim among its adherents, particularly its leaders, men of high spiritual attainments, with large heart and without any blemish in their character. That, in spite of numerous and trying vicissitudes, the Vedic religion survives today and has, in spite of its being non-proselytising, such a large following is due to the fact that in it were born from time to time, great souls, unselfish, pure and godly, who had deep devotion and religious fervour expressing their faith in the scrupulous observance of the tenets of their religion.

## VIII. SOME OF OUR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

We shall consider some institutions with which our religion is closely connected. One is the caste system and the other is temple worship. It is necessary to understand the nature of these institutions and get rid of certain false notions respecting them.

Foreigners criticise us for our caste system. Among ourselves, there is a strong and persistent move supported even by our Government to put an end to it. Of course, in the context of modern life, the rules of caste are not practised as before. But, whatever the position, it will be useful to spend some thought on the caste system and determine if it is so bad and injurious as it is said to be.

The main argument against caste is that it has led to conflicts. But it is forgotten that conflicts of caste are of comparatively recent origin. The system has been in vogue for thousands of years. That it has survived all through shows that it is not so bad after all. If it were really injurious to society, our ancestors would have abolished it long ago. But they did not do it. The fact is that conflicts have not *occurred* on the basis of caste; they have been *promoted* by interested persons. More violent than caste hatred has been religious hatred. Religious animosities have a long history. There have been clashes, not only between different religions, but also between different sects and sections of the same religion. This has led some people to conclude that caste and religion lead to fighting and blood-

shed and so we should work for the abolition of caste and of religion altogether.

A similar dispute has cropped up recently about forms of government. The fight between kings of ancient days has now been replaced by ideological conflicts with more terrible consequences. But the question is whether, because controversies range over forms of government, we should have no government at all and let humanity revert to life in the jungle. The same is the case with linguistic controversies. Language is an instrument of human intercourse. Each language is suited to the needs of the people who speak it. There need be no language *problem* if we think of language in this way. But people quarrel over language considering one to be superior and another to be inferior. Shall we, on that account, abolish language altogether?

If there is a good thing, and, if for some reason, some evil has flowed from it, the sane view is to retain the thing for its good and eliminate the root cause of the evil. This is applicable to religion and caste also. If we take caste, we find that the system was designed for the smooth functioning of society. It was a functional division, each man doing his allotted duty and all contributing to the general welfare of the community. According to the nature of the function, the nature of food, daily observances and ways of life were adopted. Aasramas were also prescribed for the same purpose. But there is no justification for one caste considering itself superior to another. Of course, there are certain restrictions. They pertain to marriages and personal observances. They are restrictions which

each caste imposes on itself; they are not imposed from outside.

A number of faggots are tied together with a string. If one faggot is removed, the bond will become loose and all the faggots will fall out. Supposing the faggots were first tied into four or five bundles, and then all those four or five bundles were tied together with a common bond; even if one faggot got loose, the bundle will remain unaffected. Similarly, members of a society are tied together in a number of cohesive bundles called castes, and then all bundles are tied together with the common bond of religion. Caste and religion are meant to keep society together so that all the component parts would strive for the general welfare of the community as a whole, in an atmosphere of co-operation, and not to create hatred and conflicts.

Let no one pride himself over his caste or status. We should think only of the duties of our respective castes without any consciousness of superiority or inferiority. Whatever be one's caste, if one has devotion to God, one can become divine in essence. Caste-consciousness can be eradicated only if one is filled with regard for dharma, is imbued with bhakti and has acquired jnaana. A holy man, a sage or wise man has no caste-consciousness since he is full of bhakti and jnaana. When dharma, bhakti and jnaana take deep root, the caste differences will recede to the background. We adore great jnaanis and bhaktas irrespective of their castes. The greatest and noblest among us looked on themselves as the lowest. Arrogance of caste superiority is a sin according to our saastras. Men

should do the duties that pertain to their castes with humility and devotion and not pride themselves on their castes.

There is one other aspect of the caste system which deserves to be emphasised. In times when it was strictly observed it was an effective instrument to keep people in the path of righteousness. If a person belonging to a caste violated the rules of caste or committed any immoral act, he was made to lose caste; he was degraded and ostracised from the community. This practice had a deterrent effect on the people and hence the moral tone of the community was high. Now, however, with the loosening of restrictions, we have to adopt other legal means to keep people on the right path, and they are not so efficacious as the dread of losing caste in times of yore.

Temples play an important part in the practices of our religion. The saintly lady Avvayar said that one should not live in a place where there is no temple. In every Hindu village, especially in South India, there is a Vishnu temple at one end and a Siva temple at the other. At bathing ghaats, near rivers and tanks there is a temple dedicated to Ganesa. What is the purpose of a temple? Though the Christians and Mussalmans do so, we do not attach importance to congregational prayers. Worship with us is a private, personal affair in the privacy of the home or standing alone before the Sun, that divine source of energy and life. But why are temples built and why do we go to them?

The material benefits which we enjoy like food, clothing etc. and the good things of life which make

us happy have all been given to us by God. We take delight in seeing fine things, in tasting delicious foods, in smelling fragrant substances and in hearing sweet music. When we enjoy these pleasures, we must think of Him from whom they came, the God whose aspects are the divinities presiding over the elements which determine the sense-organs and their respective sensations. It is our duty to gratefully offer to that God these several things which contribute to our sense pleasures and receive them back from Him as His gifts to us, as His *prasaada*. Such offering to God is what constitutes worship or *pooja*. But it may be that every person does not have the facility to do such pooja at home. Therefore, it has been ordained that in every village, a common pooja of such kind should be conducted on behalf of the entire village community. A specific set of people are charged with the duty of performing this pooja governed by rules of discipline regulating it which are known as the rituals of worship. The people of the village go to the temple to be present when these offerings are made and to remind themselves that the good things of life which they enjoy are God's gifts and utter forth their gratitude to Him in prayer and song.

Still another institution of our religion is marked by the numerous *kshetras* and *teerthas* that abound in our land from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari. In fact, the ocean that engirts our country on three sides is itself looked upon as a *punyateertha,* holy waters. Some of the cities are called salvation spots or *mokshapuris*. We speak of sacred rivers and tanks. What is their significance? How

did these spots become sacred? In the past *yugas* people acquired spiritual merit by performing tapas, intense austerities through a number of years. With the lapse of time, men's capacity for endurance and strength of will deteriorated. Our ancient sages were full of compassion for future generations. So, they themselves performed tapas at a number of places which became holy by their association with them. And then, having performed tapas, those holy personages dedicated them to those sacred spots saying that whosoever came to that kshetra or theertha would have the benefit of their tapas and would be purified and elevated thereby. That is how the custom of pilgrimage to holy places arose in our country and serves as a spiritual bond unifying all people of our motherland from one end of the country to another erasing all differences of caste, language, customs and manners. If one is asked 'Who is a Hindu?', the simplest and the most satisfactory reply will be: 'All those who draw the *ratha* of a Vishnu temple are Hindus'. If we say 'all those who draw a Siva temple car', it will be wrong as Vaishnavites may not join in it. A Vishnu temple car is dragged by everybody, Vaishnavites and Saivites, by all castes of people, by the high and the low. Temples have thus a unifying influence in religion. Similarly *kshetras* and *teerthas* too wield the community together in forms of common consciousness of what is pure and holy.

Our Society is ordered on the basis of Aasramas or stages in life, the Brahmachaari, the Grahastha, the Vaanaprastha and the Sanyaasi. There is a wrong view that Sanyaasins are parasites of society, because they do not do 'productive' work. It is said

that they do not contribute to national wealth and like beggars, they prey upon society. Such a view arises from a wrong understanding of the place of sanyaasin in our society. It is true that there are far too many so-called sanyaasins and that some of them are parasites. This should not be. A true sanyaasin is he who gives up his wealth and position and takes to sanyaasa; not he who becomes a sanyaasin to escape from the responsibilities of family and to find an easy means of livelihood by taking to begging. A real sanyaasin is a spiritual stalwart spending his time in contemplation of the Supreme and in instructing others in the way of dharma. He is to give up all mental activities which will entice him to worldly pursuits. He is to be freed even from the care of maintaining himself. He is to have no home, no earthly possession. He is not even to cook his food. He must subsist on alms that he begs for, like the Brahmachaari. In fact, the sanyaasin and the brahmachaari have the duty to beg (*yatischa brahmachaaree cha pakvaannasvaaminaa vubhau*). Society has the reciprocal duty to maintain them by giving them cooked food. Far from being harmed by these two classes of people begging for their food, it stands to gain in an immeasurable degree. In the process of begging a brahmachaari acquires *vinaya* (humility) necessary for his undivided attention to his studies by which he will become a useful member of society in due course. A true sanyaasin lives in communion with the Spirit, acquires *saanti* (peace) and sets the tone of the spiritual life of the community. He is the exemplar of the highest values of life and as such is an asset to society.

In this connection, we may consider the question of a *sanyaasi sangha*. A sangha is never contemplated for the order of sanyaasins. Forming a sangha is not a *sanyaasi lakshana*. That will lead to involvement in worldly affairs, holding offices, handling money, claiming rights and perquisites. The sanyaasin must live in solitude, and as far as possible, away from men.

*Sanyaasaasrama,* which releases a person from family responsibilities and ceremonial duties due to the devas and pitrs, is allowed by saastras only in order to enable him to utilise all his time except the hours of sleep, in controlling the senses and arresting the waverings of the mind through contemplation on the all-merciful God and finally merging in Him. If any sanyaasin spends any part of his time in works, however laudable, other than the above for which only he is released from domestic and ritualistic responsibilities, he is verily a fallen man. Public service as contemplated by the present-day political leaders is not at all the duty of a sanyaasin. It is his life mission to purify himself steadily and gradually and throw himself completely into the quest and experience of the ultimate Truth, namely God. Some people say that serving and elevating others is far superior to securing one's own individual moksha, which is said to be nothing but selfish. It is with this present-day view that some movements are in the air to organize the sanyaasins and dilute their influence on the masses and thus make the way smooth for secular propaganda. But, in truth, service to others is offered in the largest measure possible, by persons who are dedicating themselves

to self-purification and complete God-consciousness more than any body else. A person who has not purified himself cannot purify others. The mere *existence* in the world of a few such souls engaged in self-purification creates an aura by itself which tends to bring solace and peace to an innumerable number of troubled hearts. It is in this way that sanyaasins are *lokopakaarins*, benefactors of society much more than any political or social leader. Any movement tending to disturb this ideal is not at all beneficial to the welfare of humanity at large. Sanyaasa to which alone *ahimsa* in mind, word and action is ordained, is the highest summit of our culture.

## IX. MOORTI PUJA OR IMAGE WORSHIP

Every object in the world, animate or inanimate is a manifestation of the One God. If one realises this truth one will do nothing evil. One will not feel anger or disgust or hatred for any thing or person. One will have no desire for anything in particular. One may indeed develop faith of a kind through the study of scriptures. But if a person is unable to eschew the mental distractions and agonies arising from anger and desire, he cannot be said to have realized God in everything around him.

The realisation and experiencing of this fundamental truth is the true goal of life. And until a person achieves this Supreme consciousness of God in all objects, he should keep striving prayerfully. He should begin by seeking to see God at least in one object through concentration upon that particular object as God—which is one hundred percent true by itself. The grace of God resulting from such intense concentration will enable him to go further and see God manifest in all that is and thereupon he will be free from the limitations arising from non-experiencing of the truth that God is in all things. This is the fundamental basis of Moorti upaasana (sagunopaasana). This upaasana unfortunately is nowadays derided as "Idol-worship". It is a misnomer to regard Moorti upaasana as Idol worship. The true worshipper of a Moorti never feels that he is worshipping a stone or a

piece of metal. He thinks only of God—forgetting all else!

When Arjuna was steadying as directed by his Guru to take correct aim at a target, his master Drona asked him whether he saw himself, his guru or other things around. Arjuna answered, "No. I see only the leaf!" Other disciples of Drona like Duryodhana in answer to similar questions, told Drona that they saw their Guru putting questions to them. They lacked the concentration that Arjuna had. This is an illustration of the true devotee's mental state at the time of the worship of his chosen Moorti. He sees only God in the Moorti of his worship, not the material of which it is made or aught else around. From this stage the aspiring devotee can progress to the stage when he sees God and God only in everything around even in the small atom. This stage is the culmination of the spiritual effort of which Moorti upaasana is a beginning.

Our religion is criticised by persons of alien faiths and also by those belonging to the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj as being idolatrous. Islam is so much against the worship of idols that its followers do not countenance even a picture of their Prophet. Protestant Christianity does not believe in idols. The Catholics worship the images of Virgin Mary and of Christ and are idolatrous to that extent. All Christians, however, hold the Cross in great reverence and worship it as a sacred symbol. Buddhism also declaimed against idols though, strangely enough, Buddhists have erected the statues of the Enlightened One at various places and

worship them and the relics of their Teacher like His tooth etc.

Yet, at the hands of all these people, our religion comes in for common condemnation as indulging in idolatry as if to worship idols is a sin against religion. It is necessary to be clear about the meaning of worship of God in idols and pictures. It is not the idol as such, it is not the wooden or stone object that we worship. It is to the Deity present in the object or symbolised by it that we offer worship. The *saaligraama* stone symbolises Vishnu. The *Linga* represents Siva; the crystal stands for Soorya. So do other objects. They remind us of the Deities that they are considered to represent. So, when one offers worship to an idol or an image, one does so to the particular aspect of the Supreme represented by it, to the God in it as it were. While so doing, the mind is directed to God in prayerful contemplation and supplication. During the process, one gets rid of one's ego and is suffused with God-consciousness and dedicates to Him the best that one can offer and, finally one's self whole and entire.

Our religion recognises the psychological limitations of ordinary men. Not all of them can at one bound contemplate God in His abstraction from physical features. For directing the mind towards God and keeping it steady during contemplation of Him, a concrete image or idol is an invaluable help. The frail mind must go from the concrete to the abstract, from the forms of God in images to God without form. It is true that God is omnipresent; but, for purposes of worship, He is conceived of as localised in a particular object.

Moreover, there is nothing self-contradictory in thinking of the supreme God as having a form—even a multiplicity of forms. If it is granted that God is the All, even though in the ultimate conception He is formless, there is nothing inherently impossible in His assuming a variety of forms for the sake of His devotees. That is ony a mark of His condescension to satisfy the needs of those who wish to worship Him according to the promptings of their heart. Water has no colour or any particular shape. But it assumes the colour and the shape of the vessel which contains it. Even so, God by Himself may have no form; but the mind which thinks of Him is a conditioning medium. It seizes hold of Him in its folds and would like to visualize Him after its manner. Thus a rapport is established between the devotee and the Deity and an atmosphere of devotion is engendered.

Before an idol or image is worshipped, a process of divinising it is gone through. The image is made instinct with God. This is known as the process of *praana pratishta.* Every human being is a compendious expression of the cosmos. Man is a microcosm of the universe. He is made of the five physical elements, the *pancha bhootas,* which are also the substance of the universe. God in His cosmic form, inheres in the pancha boothas, which are crystallised in the human body and expressed as the five sense organs, each functioning in terms of those elements. Before an idol or image is worshipped, it has to be consecrated. The process of consecration is called as stated earlier *praana pratishta.* The devotee first performs *aatma pooja;* that is, he meditates on his inner aatman encased in his

body. By appropriate mantras he first purifies his body including his *praanas* and his sense organs. The vital airs and the organs of perception and activity animating him as the microcosm of the universe which is the macrocosm are transferred by gestures to the accompaniment of mantras on to the idol or the image wherein the manifestation of the Supreme (the *ishta devata*) is devoutly invoked. The following prayer is uttered before the praana pratishtaa:

*svaatmasamsttham ajam suddham tvaamadya*
*paramesvara*
*aranyaamiva havyaasam moortau aavaahayaamyaham*

"O! Lord of the Worlds, You are unborn and pure. You are in my heart. I invoke You in this moorti. Make Yourself visible to me in my concentration even as the fire in *arani* wood comes out by friction."

Thereupon it becomes instinct with divinity and becomes fit for worship. After this is done, the worshipper does not consider it any longer as a material object. It becomes God Himself. Then follow the sixteen items of ritualistic worship which are offered with fervour and devotion.

The forms of the images are modelled after the description of the several divinities in our Puraanas which are recensions of the Vedas adapted to popular understanding. These Puraanas celebrate each a particular manifestation of the Supreme to draw the man's minds to it and hold their attention. They serve to visualise the divinity spoken of in the Puraana and in their features emphasise the super-human and the mysterious which go with the concept of God. Thus we have the image of Devi with sixteen hands, of Kumaara with six

faces and twelve hands, of Vishnu with four hands, of Siva with the third eye, of Ganapati with the elephant face. To a person of an alien faith these may appear grotesque and bizarre, but to the devotee they signify a Puraanic event which evokes his belief and faith. The names by which the several manifestations of the Supreme are called are not of random devising; they are significant of the nature and the beneficence of those Deities. In the Hindu faith, the names are equated with those Deities, and this is vouched for in the experience of great saints who have realised the Supreme by *naama-japa* and *naama sankeertana,* the repeated utterance and singing of these divine names.

Three things are associated with the worship of any Deity. They are the *yantra* or *chakra,* the *mantra* and the *pratimaa.* The yantra is a geometrical design of a particular type with mystic significance for every part of it. The Deity is looked upon as residing in that yantra. The mantra consists of mystic Sanskritic sounds known as *beejaaksharas.* Their utterance has the effect of invoking the Deity associated with them. Even as the seed of a tree contains that tree in embryo, the beejaakshara contains the Deity in itself. The repeated utterance of the mantra surcharges the atmosphere with the divine presence, and the devotee and the image are both enveloped by that divinity. The pratimaa is the physical object consecrated for worship. All these three, the yantra, the mantra and the pratimaa together constitute the apparatus of image worship among us.

The word *linga* means a symbol. Any symbol or manifestation which points to an inference is

known in Sanskrit as linga. When we hear a peal of thunder, we conclude from it that there is a group of clouds in the sky which has produced it. The noise known as thunder is a linga which indicates the presence of the clouds. Likewise smoke is the linga of the unseen fire. This universe of myriad created objects may be considered as a linga of the Almighty. Our saastras have prescribed the linga in Siva temples as one such linga of the Almighty, the sight of which will make us think of God.

There is an appropriateness in the form of the Sivalinga as the symbol of God. The Supreme being is described as the superlatively resplendent Light or *Jyotis*. He is known as the Light of lights, the *jyotishaam jyotis*. All lesser lights derive their luminosity from Him. Dazzling like a million suns, it cannot be seen by mortal eyes. To become an object of perception, God takes material shape contracting Himself into the form of a tiny crystal familiar to us as the *spatika linga*. The popular *Baanalinga*, generally fetched from the Narmada, is an oblong object like an *anda* or egg without a definite beginning or end and symbolises the Universe as is conceived by the modern scientists too. The spatika linga is a round object without a definite beginning or end and symbolises the Supreme who too has neither beginning nor end. Such a linga mediates between the *niraakaara* or formless aspect of God and His *saakaara* aspect with specific forms. The linga has, as it were, a formless form and is intended to lead the worshipper's mind to the contemplation of the formless, qualitiless Supreme Reality or Brahman.

From the mediatory formless form where the Almighty condescends to take a divine form or Moorti with all limbs from head to foot, He manifests Himself in linga which is called the Lingodhbhava Moorti or Arunachala, with Brahma in the form of a swan and Vishnu in the form of a bear, upwards and downwards, expressing the futility of scaling the limitless Almighty. This Lingodhbhava Moorti reminds us of the emergence of Narasimha from a stamba or a pillar to convince the materialistic non-believer. This aspect of Narasimha is described in the Upanishads and the Vaishnava Literature as having some attributes of Siva, like being worshipped in the Pradosha-kaala, the time for the worship of Siva.

The "Panchamukha Linga" found in Nepal, Jambukeswaram (Tiruvaanaikaaval) near Trichy, Aihole (in Western India) and some other places expresses the emerging of the four faces of Siva from the four sides of the Linga, the fifth Oordhva Mukha being represented as formless. This basic idea of Linga completely goes against the vulgar conception of Linga Pooja as phallus worship. The phallic interpretation seems designed to exalt other later modes of worship.

While this is true of a linga made of any material, there is a special significance attaching to the spatika linga, a linga made of pure quartz. While the *abhisheka* water is poured on it, the linga is hardly visible through it, its colourless form being completely lost in that of the water which flows over it. When coloured substances like sandal paste or vermillion or a coloured flower are placed on it,

it takes on the colours of those substances though it has no colour of its own. Thus the spatika linga is taken as the best representation of the Nirguna Brahman of the Upanishads, the attributeless all-pervading Paramaatma who, for our sake, takes on qualities and exhibits Himself as the Saguna Brahman.

## X. THE CURRENCY OF DHARMA

Imagine a hill which divides two kingdoms each having a different system of currency, the coins and notes of either of which is not legal tender in the other. Suppose that a citizen of one of these kingdoms has amassed through the years a large amount of wealth which he keeps in cash and currency notes. Suppose again that the state of affairs in one kingdom gets so disturbed as to make it unsafe for this man to retain all his hoarded wealth in that kingdom. Naturally he would try to run away from his country and seek safety in the neighbouring kingdom on the other side of the hill. But he cannot carry all his wealth with him on account of their sheer weight. He will have to take with him only so much as he can conveniently carry leaving the large number of coins and notes of small denomination behind. Suppose again in this predicament, a good man comes to him and offers to give him currency notes of large denomination which are legal tender in the neighbouring country in exchange for the notes of the first kingdom. He would gladly clutch at the offer; and, relieving himself of the untransportable wealth of his native land, he would obtain in return lighter currency which he could easily carry across to the hill top to the country on the other side.

Even so, every one of us lives in perpetual danger of having to go at any moment from the world in which we are born and to live in another world into which we shall be ushered after death.

In this journey from this world to another we cannot carry with us, much as we may desire to do so, all the wealth which we have gathered for ourselves. We can carry nothing. Not a bit of the wealth will go with us. We must leave it all behind. But it is open to us to convert all this material wealth into what will be current in the kingdom to which we go. We can change it all into spiritual wealth. We can convert the 'currency' of this world into the 'notes' and 'coins' which will be 'legal tender' in the world of Spirit. Those 'notes' and 'coins' will bear on them the impress of dharma and they can be cashed in the 'Bank of Dharma' which pervades all the worlds of the universe.

Not the material goods that we have amassed, but the good and evil thoughts that have swayed our minds, the good and evil that we have thought, spoken and done, these come to us after death as merit and demerit, as *punya* and *paapa*. The *punya* is the genuine currency of the spiritual kingdom which is 'legal tender' there by which you can obtain happiness while the evil that is thought, spoken and done in this world gets transformed at the counter as illegal currency of that world, and you undergo punishment for possessing it.

If a man is asked what is dear to him, he will enumerate a number of things. That may be his wife, his children, his property and many such things that he holds dear. But this is certain; the things that he holds dear are pegs which constrain him to weep. If the thing goes away before the person dies, he weeps over having to lose it. If he dies before it goes away, he weeps for having to part from it. Attachment is the seed of sorrow. There

will be no cause for sorrow only if there is no forcible parting between a person and the thing which he holds dear. But parting is inevitable. How to take away the sorrow from parting? This can be effected by resignation, by renouncing. By mutual agreement, as it were, between the things of the world which a person holds dear and himself, he can part in peace and happiness. That is what is called freedom from attachment or *vairaagya*. Forceful separation always brings tears to the eyes. Pluck an unripe mango from its stalk. You will see it 'weeping' at the point where it has been plucked. But a ripe fruit drops down of its own accord, detaching itself from its stalk without a 'tear'. The unripe mind which attaches to the tree of samsaara sheds copious tears when forcibly separated from the things of the world. The *Jnaani* who is ripe in mind renounces the world of samsaara resigning all his desires. An unripe fruit is bitter to the taste. It is sour. But a ripe fruit is sweet. The *jnaani* who has renounced enjoys the sweetness of *saanti* while the life of one who has not acquired jnaana is bitter and sour.

It is up to us to convert all our powers of thought, speech and action into a currency which will be accepted throughout the universe. The coinage of each particular kingdom is stamped with the emblem of that kingdom or the head of its ruler and is legal tender in that kingdom only. But the currency that is dharma bears the impress of the spirit, of God whose sway extends to all the worlds. We should convert all our powers into currency notes of universal superlative denomination which will stick, not to our body, but to our

*aatman* and which we can carry quite easily. It must not be a note of debt which will be followed by a warrant of arrest. It must be one of an asset which we have earned by the good deeds that we have done. Of the three, body, wealth and mind, the second cannot be taken by us across the shores of death. We must leave it behind as an inheritance to our children. But the powers of our body and mind, what we have done with them are ours to carry beyond death. In our ascent to the hill-top to cross over to the other country, let us not be weighed down by the sins of this world born of attachment to material objects. Our thought, speech and action should secure for us a safe passage to the realm beyond and a happy sojourn there. No special skill is needed for this purpose. Cleverness is needed only to make counterfeit currency, not for using the genuine coins. Let us utter God's Name with an unsophisticated simple mind *detaching* ourselves from the things of the world and *attaching* ourselves to God's Holy Feet. Let us pray to Him with contrition and humility: 'Oh God! I possess no virtue which will make me deserve Thy grace. Do not count my disqualifications. Have mercy on me, and take me under Thy divine protection!'

## XI. SECRET OF HAPPINESS

Nara and Naaraayana were doing penance. Narayana is God Himself. Nara is a part of the divine nature. His was the highest stage among men. Hence was he called Nara. These two Nara and Naaraayana are spoken of as having incarnated as Arjuna and Krishna.

Nara and Naaraayana were doing penance. Indra is the lord of the world of gods. Being Indra is the most exalted status. The Puraanas say that whoever does a large number of sacrifices will get that status at the end and the reigning Indra will lose it. Hence, the reigning Indra used to place obstacles before all who do such tapas. But if, undaunted by them, one continues one's penance, one will succeed to that state. That is the Puraanic idea.

The same thing happens even in our modern world. If a man disciplines himself, lives an austere life and makes sacrifice for a cause acclaimed to be good, he gains exaltation above others and is accepted as leader. He holds this position till another makes a greater sacrifice and attains the leadership. The Puraanic desire for lordship was of the same kind. But it did not stop with this world. It extended to celestial regions also, to *devaloka*.

So, when Nara and Naaraayana were doing tapas, Indra got nervous if he would lose his exalted position. He began to devise means to disturb their tapas by frightening them or tempting them by damsels, arousing lust which is the enemy of tapas. These are his methods to throw obstacles in the

way of those who do tapas. He sent celestial maidens to distract Nara and Naaraayana. They went first to Nara. Though divine in essence, he was yet a man, a jeeva, albeit the highest man. So, he was not perfectly flawless. Afraid that the presence of the damsels would come in the way of his tapas, he made a loud grunt. Immediately, they ran away helter skelter. Fearing that the fire of Nara's tapas would burn them out of existence, they resolved not to turn in his direction. Nara became so angry.

The damsels approached Naaraayana who was the picture of tranquillity and peace. As soon as He saw them, Naaraayana smote his thigh with His hand. The Sanskrit word for thigh is *ooru*. When He did so, a maiden of superlative beauty came out of it. She was *Oorvasi*. When Indra's damsels saw her, they felt ashamed of the conceit of their own beauty. They exclaimed: "What are we before the beauty of this maiden!" and they went away abashed.

By this event the Lord taught that all the desires, beauties and joys of the external world really exist in one's own aatman, one's own inner self. These desires, beauties and joys are only infinitesimal particles of the infinite Love, Beauty and Aananda which belong to that Self and constitute its essence. There is nothing outside of the self. Whatever appears to be outside must finally become one with what is inside. When the Lord taught this supreme Truth by thus creating Oorvasi from His thigh, the apsara maidens fell at His feet, besought His forgiveness and protection and said: "We shall not go to Indra's court after this. We have to serve

him there for our livelihood." They begged Naaraayana to instruct them in the knowledge of Reality.

This is the story in general outline. But the moral of this story is what is contained in the following Gita verse: II.70:

*aapoorya maanamachala pratishtam*
*samudramaapah pravisanti yadvat*
*tadvat kaamaa yam pravisanti sarve*
*sa saantimaapnoti na kaamakaamee.*

Desire is what 'exists outside', that is, it has an *external reference.* It is directed to an object which lies *outside one's self.* It has also an *external locus.* If a man believes that he can be joyful only if he gets an object *which is outside of him* and directs his desires *outward,* he would never attain peace of mind or *saanti.* How can one get *saanti* if he continuously goes out in quest of external things? Such an outside object would come and go. What does it matter if it comes or goes? Let it come if it does. Then it shall be made one with that which is the nature of supreme joy and which is resident inside of one, which is the very core of one's being. A number of big rivers flow into the ocean. The ocean admits them into its bosom. Those rivers originally went 'out' from the ocean. They now come back 'into' it. When they come back, they become one with the ocean.

Even so, the 'external' joys are only particles of the *aananda* which is inside our being. When they arise, they must be mentally fused with the inner *aananda;* they must be understood to have only sprung out of that *aananda,* that they do not have an existence in their own right. Instead, these outside pleasures should not be sought as external

objects. One should not go *out of oneself* in search of them. If one realises that all are only inside, one attains saanti: *sa saantimaapnoti.*

It is wrong to believe that a man obtains happiness when position, riches and prestige which are supposed to exist outside of him are got by him and that not getting them causes grief. The delights of external objects are only a fraction of the true inner joy. The joys associated with being an Indra, or a king are only a very tiny particle of the Paramaatmasvaroopa which is compact of supreme aananda.

All the joys arising from external objects must get into one's being and merge into the inner joy. They must enter into the man's self and become one with it. Else, he cannot say 'I am happy'.

On the other hand, one who continually lives in the ecstatic experience of the *aananda* of the Paramaatman realising his non-difference from It, does not feel that there is an *external source* for his joys, that his aananda depends on the things from outside and that not getting them would cause him grief.

Indeed, if a man keeps on saying: 'I shall be happy if I get this or that from the outside world; else, I shall be unhappy', that will make him run after those objects, to 'pine for what is not', to get angry if one hinders his getting it, to feel enmity to such a one, to commit murder and end in suicide in the extremity of disappointment. There will be no peace to such a person.

All rivers flow into the ocean. They all become one with the waters of the ocean. If a river does not flow into the ocean, does the ocean feel unhappy? How is the ocean? It is for ever full. It remains un-

moved, unagitated by any feeling of deficiency. does not pine for the waters of this river or tha Even as the ocean receives into itself all water flo ing into it, so should a man receive into his inn being all the so-called 'external' joys and mix the with the ocean of *aananda* which is his Self.

It is the all-pervasive *aananda* that marks the Self of every person. Any joy that comes from outside must become one with that Self. One's real nature is the 'full' *poornam,* what is plenary. One must educate oneself to feel one's identity with that Supreme Self as plenary *aananda.* When that consciousness dawns, the little joys of the world will not *require to be sought* as they will be seen to be only fractions of the universal bliss one always enjoys. Such a one would say to oneself: "Let any joy come; it shall merge with my inner joy. If it does not come, no regrets; for the so-called 'external' joy is only a reflection of my inner joy." Such a one remains enjoying the *saanti* of an ever-full and unmoved ocean.

*Sa saantimaapnoti.*

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**SRI CHANDRASEKHARENDRA SARASWATI**

His Holiness Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati is the Sankaracharya who adorns the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha in the Madras State. His Holiness is the 68th in the succession of the occupants of the Pitha. He is devoutly adored by his disciples and held in reverential esteem by numerous others for his scholarship in the Saastras and knowledge of modern developments, for his saintliness and for his inclusive universality of outlook and attitude. His gracious eyes which beam a benediction and his inviting smile which casts a spell of intimacy are unforgettable experience of every one who has had the good fortune to stand in his presence.

An itinerant ascetic that he is, traversing the country on foot, His Holiness holds large audiences in thrall by the discourses that he delivers in Tamil in such sweet simple words which are the despair of the pedant and the delight of the innocent. His expositions of Hindu religion, some of which are reproduced here, have a classical fidelity which one misses in modern 'liberal' treatments. The reader will be amply rewarded by a careful study of its contents which show the *raison d'etre* of many doctrines and tenets of Hindu religion not generally understood in their proper import.